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The Subtlety of Hegemonic Masculinity in Nepali Films through Digital Platforms: A Critique of the Film *Saino*

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Abstract
In the paper, I argue that Nepali films are still promoting the ideology of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy implicitly through reels in the name of upholding cultural norms. Since the internet is becoming more accessible and cheaper than before, more Nepali people of all ages tend to see Nepali films conveniently on different digital platforms. For the past decade, Nepali films have been incorporating ethnic cultural contents into their productions to both promote it and serve their audiences a new flavor. However, the effect some cultural values can have on audiences cannot be overlooked. To delve into the impact of Nepali films on audiences, I undertook a case study of the Nepali film *Saino* and analyzed the film's content, and other relevant sources, applying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and other feminist ideologies. The study demonstrated that Nepali films are more concentrated on their commercial gains rather than its social and psychological impact on audiences, especially young ones. Therefore, I urge censor boards, scriptwriters, directors, producers, and audiences to critically analyze the messaging of entertainment media and engage actively in a process of deepening understanding of invisible gender dynamics so that a fairer, more inclusive and healthier society can be fostered. Overall, this paper contributes to the people's understanding of how hegemonic masculinity and cultural values are being simultaneously perpetuated in the absence of consistent censorship.
Keywords: Digital platform, masculinity, feminist ideology, gender stereotypes

Introduction
Owing to the rapid advancement of science and technology, digital platforms have gone past by mass media, and it has the potential to remain as a dominant technology. The burgeoning popularity of digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Google Play, Amazon Prime Video, and many more, invites both aspirations and concerns in human lives. Rather than a privilege and passion, digital platforms have

become a necessity in every realm—business, politics, education, service, entertainment, etc. The impact of digital platforms has rarely been resisted or controlled across the world, let alone Nepal. Nepal, despite being a poor economy, is providing internet service to the excessive need of users in every corner of the nation and the country can take pride in it. Among popular digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Netflix, etc., "Facebook is the most used social media [platform] in Nepal, which has been found being used by 79.9% of the respondents" (Bhattarai 50). Similarly, YouTube is the next most popular social media platform among people and is popular mostly for watching films.

However, most people are unaware and indifferent to the dire consequences reels can wield to our society by crossing the limit of the primary objective of entertainment industry. Films do not just entertain audiences through action, dialogue, songs, dance, music, storytelling and representation of a culture but also reshape social ideologies either positively or negatively. A general understanding of films is to serve as an entertainer and reflect social phenomena with some messaging, but it is also a fact that films tend to promote some cultural norms that have the potential to do more harm than good in the long run.

This article also attempts to look into gender dynamics in films based on a particular case of *Saino* (2019). A film has a big crew. Each actor embodies a different character and each character communicates some subtle messaging about acceptable and restricted behaviors for men and women. Watching and consuming the same messaging repeatedly can influence audiences' perception and train brains accordingly. To be more specific, the paper endeavors to unpack the complexities of masculinity depictions in Nepali films at large because how men and women are represented in films shapes the future of society.

One naysayer might contend that numerous positive changes have occurred with respect to "gender representation ever since the women's movement in the 1970s because how men and women are viewed in the society" (Mishra 1). Even though media roles, seminars, TV and radio programs, road plays, feminist campaigns, and improved literacy rates have challenged patriarchy and gender stereotypes in Nepal, male characters are still presented the way they used be two decades ago. In other words, even today male actors demonstrate that they are superior, more aggressive, more powerful, and more dominant than other sexes. This is a piece of evidence that patriarchal ideology is still prevalent. This study examines all components of *Saino* (2019), a Nepali film, and brings to the forth how this film has made a visual presentation of masculinity and how this projection of masculinity is going to affect audiences' perception and attitudes, especially young people. As a result, this study attempts at dissecting insufficiently explored aspect of Kollywood[1] and sharing some insightful thoughts on gender issues in the context of Nepali cinema.

Methodology and Gender Stereotypes as Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the qualitative study model to fulfil the objectives of looking into how digital platforms have been paving the way for the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in Nepali society through Nepali films. *Saino* (2019) has been selected as a primary text, for this film has incorporated an ethnic culture into its content to serve the needs of most audiences. In addition, to substantiate and justify the arguments of this study, I have included secondary sources such as peer-reviewed articles, books, online

[1]It is a Nepali cinema industry which includes films that are produced in different languages spoken in Nepal, such as Nepali, Maithili, Rai, Limbu, Bhojpuri and many more.

newspaper articles, websites, and many more. Notably, I have included expert opinions of Ms. Srijana Gurung, an English Lecturer.

Although the title of the article includes only "hegemonic masculinity," I have put the concept of "sex," "gender," and "masculinity" because they are interconnected. In the absence of one, our efforts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the title can be obstructed. The entire article is guided by the Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, and philosophical as well as feminist ideologies of Aristotle, Moi, Kimmel, and Wood. Traditionally and "historically, men have been better privileged than women" (Sherma 91), yet gender roles have haunted both boys and girls psychologically and impacted their social lives adversely.

Right from the moment we are born, our society voluntarily takes responsibilities in teaching us about gender. We receive a "sex" at birth, either "male" or "female," disregarding other sexual orientations, such as LGBTQ+. Throughout childhood we get taught about the roles, behaviours, and attributes that are considered appropriate to that female or male identity. The term "masculinity" refers to the roles, behaviours, and attributes that are associated with maleness and considered appropriate for men. Similarly, the term "femininity" refers to a society's ideas about the roles, behaviours, and attributes that are considered appropriate to women and associated with femaleness. Historically, colonialism paved the way for the concept of masculinities by dividing gender roles because "when European women went to the colonies, it was mainly as wives and servants within households controlled by men" (Adams and Savran 246). We deal with these social ideas about masculinity and femininity every day. Though the very notion of masculinity dates back to around the 16th century, different types of masculinity have emerged and since then masculinity has been redefined several times due to political awareness. Although "new patterns of hegemony" have come into existence due to "transnational corporations, media, and security system" (Connell and Messerschmidt 854), this article will present arguments and evidence to substantiate the prevalence of the extent of hegemonic masculinities in the Nepali context through the case of a Kollywood film, *Saino*.

Even though *Satya Harishchandra* (1951) is considered to be the first film ever recorded in the Nepali language and released in India, *Aama* (Mother) (1964) is the first Nepali film ever released in Nepal. In the earlier stage of Nepali film industry, films brought to the fore the issues of untouchability, patriotism, child marriage, domestic violence, and dowry system. Some Nepali films have served as a social reformer by criticizing social evils. As literacy rate started improving, most social evils were eliminated, and negative impacts of such evils were made less severe. The Maoist movement is also believed to have raised political awareness in remote areas of Nepal. Shneiderman also believes that "In Nepal, both the Maoist movement and the 2006 *jan andolan* may be seen as evidence that this capacity [political consciousness] is alive and well" (306). As a result, the number of Nepali films that explored gender issues began to soar. More women characters were being featured for different roles. "However, variation does not eliminate typicality of roles. Most of the Nepali films continue to focus on male's point of view" (Bista 12). In the 74 years long history of Nepali cinema, only a handful films such as *Saraswati* (1995), *Jhola* (2013), *Kali* (2014), *Nari* (2016), *Teen Ghumti* (2016), *Maaleeka* (2018), *Sunkesari* (2018), *Palash* (2019), *Aama* (2020), *Blind Rocks* (2021), *Boksi Ko Ghar* (2024), and *Shambala* (2024) have featured women as lead characters. Only one or two of these films are known to be blockbusters. "While elements of melodrama are replete in Nepali films, there have been films like *Megha* (2014), *Uma* (2013), *Soongava* (2012) which can be categorized under the genre of 'Independent woman film'. But none of these three films were mainstream successes,

and all received mixed reviews" (qtd. in Karki 133). From these proofs, it can be concluded that women-centric films are not still welcomed and supported in Nepali society. Dixit claim that "By the early 2010s, around 40 Nepali films were released each year. That number surged to more than 100 films in 2019" (par. 1). This increase may be viewed as positive, yet the number of films with women as lead characters is not proportional and satisfactory. Needless to say, most Nepali films still marginalize women and reduce them to subordinated, passive, and dependent roles.

On a positive note, "Nepal's literacy rate has reached 77.4 percent, showing an impressive growth in the educated population of the country" (Koirala, par. 1). Literate people possess the ability to look into the underlying messaging of each Nepali film. Conscious and literate people are expected to critically examine the content of films they see. In contrast, Nepali audiences have been engrossed profoundly by the entertaining component of films. Films are still meant to a source of enjoyment and entertainment by a large portion of the Nepali population. Harmful consequences of some content of films have gone unnoticed. As long as Nepali films valorize heroic performances of male actors and project them as principal characters, social reformers, true revolutionists and intelligent persons by relegating female actors to the position of supporting actors, the effect of hegemonic masculinity on society will continue to persist by complicating the country's mission to disrupt the gender gap. Since patriarchy is deeply rooted in Nepal, demonstrating stereotyped gender roles through reels rub more salt into the wound.

It is not only Nepal that is unable to achieve gender equality and equity. The most developed countries such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, France, and many others are still struggling to narrow gender gaps and criminalize gender stereotypes. Most of the leadership positions have been reserved for men even in those affluent countries. Gender equality has still become a utopian idea. It does not mean to generalize that all women are underprivileged and all men overprivileged. To some degree, both men and women have been suffering at the hands of traditional beliefs. But the fact "that having power over political, economic, and social affairs is associated with masculinity. The roles, behaviors, and attributes that are associated with maleness and considered masculine usually bring greater social status, economic reward, and political power than those associated with the feminine" (UN WOMEN 13). In recent years, Nepali women are making a lot of progress and carving out their niches in different sectors, which is commendable. Yet, "the norm remains that leadership is seen as masculine and done by men-authority still has a male face" (13). Several Nepali women have gone into politics or been promoted to senior positions in business; however, they are often stigmatized for not showing womanly characteristics or being too manly. Some men might feel threatened or challenged and their egos are hurt when they see more women in leadership positions. When there are women leaders, arrogant men hardly cooperate and collaborate with these women leaders.

This paper claims that gender is a socially and culturally designed list of roles that must be assigned to boys and girls separately. "Sex" and "gender" are different concepts; however, these concepts are used interchangeably in Nepali society. "Sex" is biologically determined, but "gender" is socially constructed. When it comes to the notion of gender, socially and culturally defined expectations, behaviors and attributes distinguish masculinity and femininity. This means a "sex" is assigned at someone's birth and "gender" is imposed based on a "sex." So, "sex" and "gender" emerge almost at the same time. We will focus more on gender issues in our society. For centuries, Nepali society has witnessed men as the head of families and organizations. Family structures, political landscapes, and people's perceptions are gradually changing and patriarchy is beginning to be weaker than before. "Even while the goal of patriarchy is not to oppress

women, a society that values masculinity unfavorably emphasizes masculinity and masculine traits than feminine traits" (K.C. et al. 111). In Nepal, we can still see the gender gap in politics, education, business, military, entertainment—in every possible sector. They add that "Men have traditionally oppressed/suppressed women in order to demonstrate their dominance over them in society" (111). Unfortunately, girls or women are still struggling for their identities in almost every sector. "They are negotiating their identities through the spaces and roles allocated to them in a patriarchal social order where they are left angry and powerless" (Karki 132). In other words, women feel helpless because their positioning and agency depend on male scripterwriters' and directors' mercy. As oppression and domination have been associated with traditions, it takes a lot of time for people to deprogram traditional values that have been deeply ingrained in people's minds. Bista's point is relevant here that "gender identity is a process that goes through social and cultural norms, rituals and practices; consequently, men and women get accustomed to recognize their respective places in social and familial hierarchy" (15). When boys and girls perform certain roles repeatedly for years, they suddenly cannot swap their roles or adapt them. Habits do not die easily. Social imposition, culture, and habit have complicated the idea of gender. In a multicultural country like Nepal, challenging long-standing norms is time-consuming and detrimental at large.

Gender is multi-faceted. It strongly relates to patriarchy, culture, social norms, and perceptions. "Feminist like Toril Moi believe that patriarchy constructs certain characteristics as masculine and feminine and impose them on men and women. Moi contends 'feminine and ('masculine') represent social constructs . . . and to reserve 'female' and 'male' for purely biological aspects of sexual" (qtd. in Mishra 2). Feminist like Moi holds patriarchy responsible for the construction of gender and gender stereotypes, which causes physical, emotional and social disturbances to both men and women. Similarly, Lwambo, a sociologist, believes that "the process of 'gendering' is infused with power, as it serves to create, legitimize and reinforce social hierarchies. Gender analysis is a tool that can be used to dismantle these inequalities" (8). Gender is non-biological and is constructed through societal and cultural beliefs by those men who are in power. Gender is a systematic process. To change gender, one has to change social and cultural norms.

Carrigan et al. bring up Sexton's definition of "masculinity" that relates to manly attributes such as "courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure, and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body" (562). The idea of masculinity is very complex. This complexity harms both men and women equally. Men are enforced to meet certain standards and women are regarded as outcast. It is harmful to both in both ways. Connel blames four components for the social construct of masculinity. During the sixteenth century "four developments seem particularly important for the making of those configurations of social practice that we call 'masculinity'"—cultural change, colonization, capitalism and individualization ("*Masculinities*" 186). Situationally men and women are placed in different role settings, not based on biological instincts, but on physique. This practice was systematized, re-practiced, ingrained in minds and perpetuated. Now, people are having a hard time deprogramming those masculine attributes from their consciousness and psychology. Unless people clear these preoccupations and rewrite the principles of good masculinity, masculinity keeps existing in a subtle way.

We have been convinced that some situations in history divided men's duties and women's duties in the sixteenth century in Europe. But later people started to view

gender roles as biological attributes, and the difference was perpetuated. Now, we will delve into some philosophical insights into gender. The equality between men and women were acknowledged in some writings of the Greek philosopher, Plato, "who described women and men as having the same nature and worth and deserve the same education and legal treatment" (qtd. in Lips 61). Supporting Plato's acceptance of equality between boys and girls, Borghini adds that "Plato believed in metempsychosis (essentially reincarnation), that the human soul was sexless and could change genders from life to life" (par. 3). Unfortunately, Plato's idea of equality "fades out in his later writings, however, in which female weakness and inferiority are used as justification for assigning different social roles to men and women" (qtd. in Lips 61). While men were associated with physicality and toughness, women were confined to "soft activities." The disparity, however, continued to prevail.

Following in the footsteps and taking Plato's latter writing into account, Aristotle solidified the gender stereotype viewing women as inferior and incomplete. To Aristotle, a female was just "an 'ordinary' deformity" and "in some respects, a defective man" (qtd. in Lips 61). For Aristotle, "women were fit only to be the subjects of male rule" (Borghini, par. 4). Gender has not only been defined biologically, socially, culturally but also psychologically from the nineteenth century. Lips adds research on psychological theories has been burgeoning since then. Such theories "have postulated that men and women differ in the way they develop and sue moral reasoning, the ability to make judgements about right and wrong" (574). Magnusson and Marecek opine that there exist psychological differences between men and women. They share that a person's everyday experience determines differences between the sexes. For example, they argue that "Many men exercise in order to increase their body size, whereas many women exercise in order to decrease their body size" (164). This trend of exploring gender role differences will continue, with scholars' different analytical lenses.

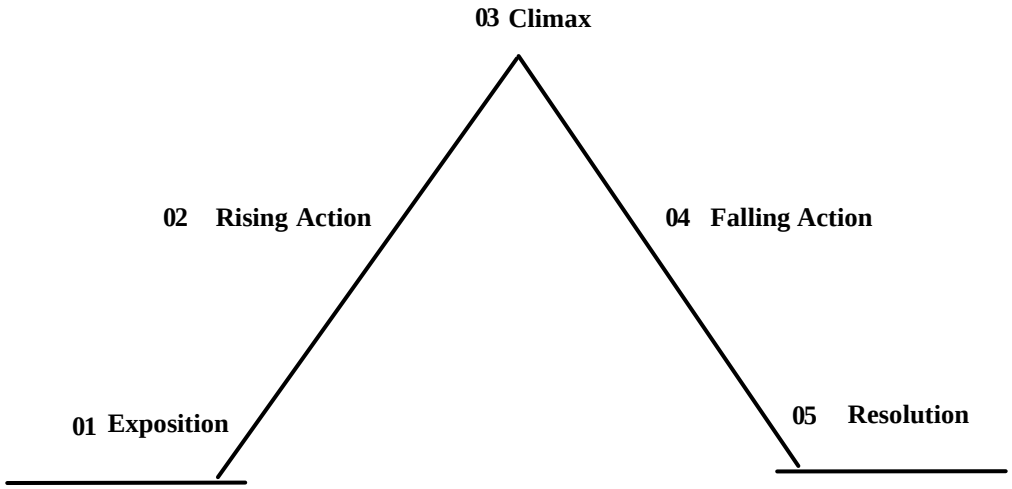
In recent years, gender theorists have connected gender roles to different social components such as communication, interaction, family setup, etc. According to Wood, "As parents and others reward girls for what is considered feminine and discourage behaviors and attitudes that are masculine, they shape little girls into femininity" (48). In addition to family attitudes toward gender, social media platforms where teenagers nowadays meet and teach others can be the most influential factor in shaping someone's outlook on gender. Watching feminists' interviews and following women leaders on social networking sites can encourage women to challenge traditional understanding of gender. On boys' end, if boys join manosphere groups or any alt-right groups on social media, boys will be more conservative and reinforce traditional norms. This can widen further gender gaps and promote gender stereotypes. No laws allow hegemonic masculinity to develop and spread at all. But the ideals of men's superiority, aggression, power and attitude are being implicitly "achieved by culture, institutions and power" (Connell and Messerschmidt 832) rather than by explicit force.

Saino: A Story of the Inter-Racial Marriage

Saino, a 2019 Nepali film, was produced by Bhuwan Chand and directed by Ramesh Thapa. The film has a simple storyline and is set in a Nepali village, adjacent to Kathmandu, the capital city. The film highlights the inter-racial marriage, hegemonic masculinity and the culture of kidnap marriage. Protagonist Raj (played by Raj Kumar) and Anu (played by Miruna Magar) love each other, but they feel uncomfortable sharing their love for each other due to their caste. As an antagonist, Maite, Anu's cousin (played by Roydeep Shrestha), hatches a plot to disrupt Anu's relationship with Raj. Referring to the Lama culture, Maite plans to kidnap her and marry her forcefully. This vision is

further supported by his familial relationship. However, when Anu declines his marriage proposal, Maite feels his masculinity is questioned and he kidnaps her. But Raj, as a hero, rescues her from the clutches of Maite.

The film upholds a customary plot. The film begins with a normal everyday life in a village. After some time, the film presents some tensions and suspense. The film intensifies audiences' curiosity but the conflict is resolved toward the end. The film encompasses songs, fights, dances, dialog—everything on the whole. Even if the film ends on a positive note that offenders have to pay price, the film's some underlying messaging that males and females have different abilities and they need to conform to societal and cultural roles can have adverse effects on audiences, particularly teenagers. Moreover, the portrayal of kidnap marriage can be an urgent topic to bring to the table.



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Anu belongs to a Lama family, while Raj comes from a Brahaman (upper class) family. Raj loves Anu, yet he is too shy to propose to her.	Being aware of the growing relationship between Anu and Raj, Maite, an antagonist, visit Anu's family with a marriage proposal.	Maite hatches a plot to kidnap Anu to marry her by force, which used to be a cultural norm in the past.	Raj and Anu happen to meet each other in Kathmandu after a long time. Yet, Raj is not able to tell her how much he loves her.	Finally, during his fight with Maite and other gang members, he reveals that he can do anything for Anu.

Fig. 1. The plot of the Nepali film *Saino* (2019).

Hegemonic Masculinity in *Saino*

Kelly also considers hegemonic masculinity as a set of qualities "such as physical strength, virility, self-reliance, independence, and self-confidence" (98). Lwambo attaches masculinity to "the male sex role, describing ways men perform the social role of being male" (8). In the context of Nepal, hegemony and manliness are placed side by side. Muscular bodies, height, hoarse voice, mustache, beard, fearlessness, aggression, etc. are some of the general attributes of manhood. Kimmel's point is

noteworthy. Men's genes are not intrinsically imbued with such attributes. Manhood "is socially constructed . . . it is created in our culture" (3). Reiterating the same proposition, Cheng defines "hegemonic masculinity [as a behavior] is characterized by numerous attributes such as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, and control" (298). If such attributes are not upheld by any man in Nepal, he is certainly labeled as modest, cowardly, hen-pecked, chicken-hearted, womanly, and the list goes on. From babyhood, boys are inspired to blossom into alpha males and enjoy power, freedom and domination in society. Manly attributes are still rewarded, promoted and exemplified in Nepal's context, which is extensively mirrored in some scenes and dialog of the Nepali film—*Saino*. In the subsequent section, I will analyze the film under the hegemonic masculinity lens.

Fig. 2. The female actor in a household setting from *Saino* [Source: Author's screenshot].

As shown in Fig. 2, "When the film begins, Anu, a female protagonist, is seen doing a household chore with her mother, whereas her father is found sitting on a mat on the floor, sipping at his local wine and ordering them. He is portrayed as not only the head of the family but also the commander. In other words, he is the dominant character. He enforces laws at home. Anu and her mother are subordinated and loyal to the head of the family. They do not dare to ask him why he just sits on the floor, drinking local wine instead of doing something worthy. Looking at such a setup, any growing child will grasp a different meaning and interpret the setup much more differently than we may expect. Kellner, cultural studies scholar, opines that "Radio, television, film, and other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless . . . Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil" (qtd. in Holtzman and Sharpe xvi). Mass media plays more influential roles than other factors when it comes to shaping cultural ideologies, values and norms, since they present content in more persuasive ways and give a sense of authenticity to audiences. Lai et al. go further and claim "Consumption of different media cultivates individuals' mindset, which in turn affects people's real life" (15). Public awareness is one of the powerful weapons to tackle it.

Anu, a female protagonist, is projected as a simple character in the film. She is the eldest child of the family. The director characterizes her as an ordinary and

countrified girl. Her father does not anticipate anything better and worthier than what most Nepali women have been doing for years in the Lama culture. When she is preparing to take two gallons of local wine to Mane's hotel, he says, *Aba else ta raksi parera khane vo* ("She will be self-dependent by making local alcohol,") (*Saino* 5:47-5:50). Her very father undermines her leadership and caliber to excel outside the household domain. Holtzman and Sharpe argue that "[t]he simpler the character or theme, the more likely it is to be stereotyped. The more complex the characters or themes [are], the less likely stereotyping will occur" (93). The chosen theme of the film is simple, and the character is simple. Therefore, gender stereotypes are being reinforced in films by maintaining simplicity. At least in Nepal's context, the simpler the story and the setting are, the more likely gender stereotyping will be ingrained in the tender minds of young people, in particular.

Fig. 3. Anu's father accepting the marriage proposal without seeking her consent [Source: Author's screenshot].

Fig. 3 Shows that when it comes to making major decisions, men exercise their power and do not find it important to seek women's consent. In *Saino*, Anu's father does not consult any of the women members of his family ahead of accepting a marriage proposal, belittling their value. During their conversation, Maite's uncle tells Anu's father, *Abo tapai hami vaneko ta kutumbai paryo. Maiteko Anu mathi ta hakai lagchha* ("We are a family. Maite has the cultural right to marry Anu") (17:39 – 17:42). Similarly, Maite's mother reinforces the notion of masculinity when she scolds him, saying: *Naamarda kaika . . . Mamako chori leuna pani fakai fakai leunu parne. Taanera leuna sakinas. Tero appa le ni malai taaner leko bujhis* ("You are impotent. Why are you trying to coax your cousin (maternal uncle's daughter) into eloping with you? Don't you have the power to drag her? Your father also dragged me to make his wife. Did you get it?") (24:24 – 24:46). When older generations pass down such a tradition to younger ones that needs to be corrected, younger generations may take advantage of it for something they are desperate for. "Within the traditional context, hegemonic masculinity is enforced . . . They tend to be transformed from one generation to another through using

specific traditions" (Mshweshwe 3). Some rude, masculine, and malicious men like Maite will surely be in favor of upholding and perpetuating this kind of tradition. Be it the film crew's objective to raise awareness or promote such a culture, incorporating such scenes and dialogue, it is going to misfire. Such portrayals are more likely to impact younger minds. Censor Board Nepal must honestly censor each movie and take such issues into account to create a healthy society.

Men's masculinity is not being mirrored through the exposure of their muscular physique but also through their abusive, loud and harsh language. Maite's position of carrying weapons and speaking dominantly to Raj's mother apparently demonstrate masculine attributes. This scene might be a wrong action to be imitated by younger ones. This stands in sharp contrast to gender equality appeals and campaigns that are being circulated in Nepal. In the film, upon knowing the sudden disappearance of Raj and Anu from the village, Maite furiously rushes to Raj's home and hurls disrespectful and offensive words at Raj's mother: *Kaha chha tyo? Kaha chha tero choro? . . . Tero choro nikaal yaha!* ("Where is he? Where is your son? . . . Get your son to me" (*Saino* 29:45-29:54). This level of rude language is not acceptable to elderly people in Nepal. The use of such rude and violent language in a film's dialogue implies that men still want to maintain their superiority and dominate women physically and linguistically. Command sentences and Wh-questions authenticate masculine dominant and phallocentric language, which Kristeva calls "semiotic," as "it works like an unorganized signifying process. The regulation of the semiotic flux produces logic, syntax, and rationality, which she calls 'the symbolic'" (Selden 223). It, therefore, can be concluded that the symbolic use of language underscores male domination.

Fig. 4. Women are dancing to an item song to entertain men in *Saino* [Source: Author's screenshot].

As shown in Fig. 4, traditionally, "dance" has been accepted as a feminine skill and "dancers" as public properties / entertainers in a male-controlled setting. In ballets, girls seem to have more control, whereas in street dances, men seem to be at the center. But, in real pictures, men are still viewed as lead actors and women as support actors. The difference immediately becomes visible to intellectual eyes and curious minds. In Fig. 4 above, male existence is obvious in the dance-performing realm. In this particular

song setting, these women dancers in short dresses are objectified and beautified to pacify men's intense sexual desires. Men are seen sipping at their Western drinks and deriving tremendous pleasure from women's exposed bodies and dances. Men are consumers and women are commodities in this sense. Nobody concentrates on these dancers' skills and movements, but men fix their gazes at their bodies and fantasize about having a romantic relationship with them. A big question arises here: Are films supposed to attract audiences through stories or such item songs where females are no longer treated as skilled manpower but as puppets? In Hollywood movies, we barely see item songs but female characters' remarkable feats. I fear that if children watch such movies, they are going to consume wrong and biased content immediately and it will prove to be dangerous. As long as such songs and content are not filtered in Nepali films, everyone's efforts to achieve gender equality and women empowerment are bound to be futile.

Fig. 5. Raj is placed in the center as a dominant character in *Saino* [Source: Author's screenshot].

In Fig. 5 above, we can see a male actor (Raj) who is smartly dressed. He is positioned in the center of the frame, which further solidifies the notion of smartness, attractiveness, and masculinity. If his presence is compared to that of the two other female actors, his presence conveys a sense of gentleness. Contrastingly, the others are dressed like dolls, with full exposure of their upper chests and whole arms. In other words, it is not surprising if they are perceived as beautiful objects to be bought and used whatever way they like. No audiences may conceive of them as gentle ladies but eye-catching and appealing things that are being manipulated. This moment can also be interpreted as an abundance of women but rarity of handsome and smart men. Therefore, the male actor is sharing his enjoyable time with two female actors simultaneously. This positionality furthers the belief that men are more special than women.

Fig. 6. Raj (on the right) is trying to rescue Anu from Maite's clutches (on the left) [Source: Author's screenshot].

In Fig. 6 above, the male protagonist is trying to rescue the female protagonist from the male antagonist. The antagonist wants to possess her as if she were an object. He says to Raj, the male protagonist, *Yo mero mamako chhori ho. Yeslai mero hak lagchha. Hamro ragatko saino chha. Ta kina bichma aairanchas* ("She is my maternal uncle's daughter (cousin). I have the right to marry her. We have a blood relationship. Why do you interfere in our relationship?") (*Saino* 1:49:30 -1:49:37). Maite is reluctant to consider Anu's desires and self-esteem. She is like a lifeless being who must act on others' directions. Raj fights Maite and saves her from Raj. Why do male actors always have to be protective of female actors in most Nepali films? Why are male actors exhibited as masculine? Why are lady actors projected as helpless, effeminate, and inferior beings who suffer at the hands of men and are rescued by men? Here, McVittie et al. contend that "masculinity thus symbolizes and enacts power over other masculine identities as well as over other women" (122). The rescue of Anu from Maite is presented as a scenario where Raj's role as Anu's rescuer and protector reinforces traditional ideals of masculinity, embodying these qualities in a robust manner.

Similarly, this scene also presents a capture marriage debacle that is prevalent in "various other non-caste ethnic groups such as Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Magar, Chepang, Baragaunle and even Sunwar and Jirel" (Gurung, 2014) in Nepal. He also notes that capture marriage is in decline among all communities due to education, urbanization, and mass communication. However, including such indigenous issues and stories that demonstrate hegemonic masculinity will not only revive such cultures but also incite youngsters to avail themselves of them. Srijana Gurung, who belongs to an ethnic group spoke to me on the phone and said that such films tend to provoke indigenous communities to repeat such social and cultural phenomena. She also complained about those ethnic groups that relish the idea that their cultures have been included in a film without having a slight realization of its potential negative effect on their young children. It is time to examine how our cultures are being projected in films and how they are impacting our young generations because Nepali films are becoming accessible on YouTube.

Reel and Real into Consideration

Reels often mirror real phenomena and it is challenging for audiences to gauge the extent to which original content has been shown. Reels' dangerous impact cannot be

undermined. They have the ability to inculcate the culture of gender biases into audiences, especially young people. Filmmakers are not always to blame. Filmmakers do not realize in many cases that they are unconsciously reinforcing and perpetuating gender stereotypes through their content. However, a governing body must take the responsibility to orient film industry representatives. As I have mentioned previously, films are watched by any age group. That is why film industries have to be cautious about potential detrimental messaging. Mack defines a "film as a form of public pedagogy, mirrors social narratives on screen and instructs society how to view others and think about the world" (iv). Eliminating the content of unhealthy masculinity from films is a must to envision a fairer, more inclusive and healthier society. Films can be labeled as "good schools" or "bad schools" based on what they teach and how they teach. Disintegrating controversial and unhealthy content from storytelling, filmmakers contribute to positive social change and such initiatives deserve to be admired. In recent times filmmakers can choose to explore a lot of fictional characters and narratives that revise old traditions and help in shaping public perceptions more positively. Indeed, Nepali films can be both an entertainer and a powerful institution to accelerate positive movements through their rhetoric, leading to a much healthier society where boys and girls are not compelled to suffer at the hands of masculinity.

Watching Nepali films like *Saino*, growing young girls may have an inferiority complex about their own self. Such movies are instilling negative gender stereotypes into the young minds of both boys and girls, which may have not been taken into serious account by Nepali film crews. Smith et al. are right to claim that "[e]xposure to such distorted 'reel' world images may be having detrimental effects on youths' gender-role socialization" (783). If children see such a grim portrayal of gender bias in Nepali films repeatedly, they start to see girls as "weak" or believe that women are of little value and importance. Wood has rightly shared that "children imitate the communication they see on television, films, and DVDs, as well as the communication of parents, teachers, siblings, and others. At first, young children are likely to mimic almost anything" (48). Unfortunately, Nepali films are teaching such misconceptions. On the other hand, for boys, "the social learning may be positive in the sense that they see male images as prevalent and male stories as important. But ultimately, both boys and girls who view these traditional depictions are likely to have limited ideas of what is real and true about men and women emblazoned in their brains, hearts, and beliefs" (Smith et al. 783). And this status quo may lead girls to experience a negative impact on their self-esteem and sense of empowerment. As children, they may imitate many misconceptions and discriminations. These wrong conceptions are deeply ingrained in their brains. As they grow older, they are programmed in such a way that they fail to decipher these detrimental codes and continue boosting bad output.

Hegemonic Masculinities in Patriarchal Nepali Societies

I do not primarily intend to be critical of Kollywood. Film crews in Nepal are making a lot of contribution to boost the economy of the country and creating job opportunities in Nepal. There are many Nepali films uploaded to YouTube and other digital platforms such as Netflix, Google Play, Amazon Prime Video, etc., which demonstrate girls are as competent as boys, and in some cases, girls outdo boys. Being one of the poor countries, Nepal is trying its best to increase the literacy rate and launch as many awareness programs as possible to eradicate gender biases from society. In the remote areas of Nepal, "hegemonic masculinity" has become indispensable in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy is the outcome of the past which we cannot easily get rid of. That's why "the domination of men and the subordination of women constitute a historical

process, not a self-reproducing system" (Connell 844). Some men still accept that "deep-rooted, male-controlled customs" have contributed significantly to "the acceptance of domestic violence" in Nepal. Some men said firmly that they must demonstrate manhood within marriage through physical discipline to correct their wives' behaviors and to adhere to static social roles" (Pun et al. 8). Hegemonic masculinity must be expanded to understand the "role entrapment which is the function of conformity to gender expectations" (Johnson and Schulman 1) related to the pressure to follow hegemonic masculinity.

Furthermore, "in patriarchal societies women are not conceptualized as holding power, wielding power, being powerful unless it is in relationship to aspects of the domestic or private domain which is seen as the 'natural' location for women" (Barriteau 29). So, a common reason behind domestic violence is family disputes, ego problems, traditional expectations of men, as well as men's attempts to express their masculinities.

Through an analysis of *Saino* (2019), the paper has discovered that Anu, Raj and Maite are the central characters whose action perfectly resembles Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity that valorizes a man's dominant attitude of being a man. In the film, patriarchy and cultural atmospheres prove to be a license to allow Raj and Maite to undermine Anu's abilities and aspirations. Both Raj and Maite never feel a small flash of realization about how their thoughts and behavior enforce her to feel inferior and marginalized. From Connell's theoretical lens, these two men exhibit hegemonic masculinity because society has already set up gender roles and gender stereotypes into their brain system implicitly. To put it another way, they acquire these traits through social and cultural interactions. They never become conscious of what they are doing and how they are drawing border lines based on their sexes.

As "masculine stereotypes include heterosexuality, strength, leadership, dominance, etc., the exhibition of such characteristics disempowers girls by creating opposite qualities to function within" (Pant, par. 5). Women are subordinated by body-reflexive practices that are typified by an "obligatory heterosexuality" ingrained in the hegemonic masculinity, and men are entrapped in the patriarchal frame to follow hegemonic masculinity because of traditionally defined gender roles and societies' expectations of them. *Saino* (2019) is one of the several Nepali films that projects female characters as secondary characters, undermining their potential and limiting their contribution to household chores. They are also deprived of their agency and self-actualization. Anu's existence is negotiated by her father, relatives and two male lovers. Contrarily, Raj and Maite (male characters) exhibit their physical power to prove their manliness. This attitude is always expected and endorsed by men's society in Nepal and elsewhere. When such toxic content is consumed by young audiences, they are more likely to uphold patriarchal ideology to enjoy socially and culturally granted privileges, treating female members as outcasts in their domain. Therefore, there is a strong need for consistent censorship and self-realization. Moreover, education, awareness, technology, and media are playing an instrumental role in transforming hegemonic masculinities into transformative masculinities. Nevertheless, some incidences or examples of hegemonic masculinities are still deeply rooted in Nepali patriarchal societies, ingrained in people's mindsets, and strongly grounded in everyday lived experiences.

Conclusion

None of us can be a time traveler and go back to fix problems or destroy the origin of any forms of violence and discrimination. But we together can change tomorrow and envision an egalitarian or utopian society. Films are one of the most effective mediums to spread content or messaging. A problem occurs when what Nepali

films teach and what educational institutions teach contradict. Nepali film crews similar to those of *Saino* (2019) need to be serious and conscious of what they are selling. Actors are no less than teachers and films are no less than textbooks and movie theatres are no less than schools. It is impossible to achieve positive goals when we do not stand together and convey the same messaging with the same intensity and attitude. Film production teams must not hesitate to consult with subject or culture experts before they start their film shootings. Cultures are not natural. They are the outcome of human thoughts. Because there is not enough scholarship on how Nepali films that can be accessible on different digital platforms are impacting audiences' perceptions about gender roles or hegemonic masculinity when films pick cultural content, this study is bound to add a new dimension to the ongoing discourse of hegemonic masculinity in the Nepali film industry. Legal documents alone cannot nurture good cultures. Nepali producers, directors, scriptwriters, and actors are urged to engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, critical examination of content and disruption of unequal gender representation in Nepali society. More avenues should be explored by new researchers in search for a more convincing answer to mitigating the negative effects of Nepali films that are committed to promoting Nepali cultures. Quantitative studies on this issue can be more intriguing and impactful.

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